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ABSTRACT

The field of student development is currently quite fluid, which means that there is room for almost any carefully formulated hypothesis about the developmental process. The author discusses three models of student development but concludes that none should serve as the only model for student development specialists. There is profound and important difference between student services and student development that must be recognized if the movement is to have any credibility. Offering student services that are useful and desired is not the same as offering programs deliberately designed to help students know who they are and what they wish to be and to do in this life. The author stresses that if the profession is to make substantial progress and to gain the respect of students and academic colleagues, it will have to begin to educate a new generation of student development specialists. They will need to be able to contribute to the scholarship and research, theory and practice of human development from birth through death. (Author/PC)

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Assessment of Student Development

K. Patricia Cross

Happy 50th birthday, ACPA. I salute you for embarking, at your age, on a new career. I understand that Tomorrow's Higher Education (THE Project) expects to offer some new career roles to student personnel professionals. Although career changes at age 50 are increasingly common, they are not yet common enough to prevent well-intentioned friends from wondering if you are flexible enough, at this point in your life, to make the necessary changes. Changes are difficult enough if you know precisely what is to be accomplished. But the new profession of student development facilitators lies in deep and not very clearly charted waters.

My assignment today of discussing the assessment of student development can be easily likened to navigation through uncharted waters. Webster says that navigation is the process of "determining position, course, and distance traveled." While it is obvious that we need navigational aids in setting a new course for student personnel professions,

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there is no point in working on navigational instruments that will guide us where we want to go until we have a realistic picture of the destination as well as the rocks and currents that may deflect our progress.

Since any good navigator needs to consult the pilot as well as charts, I talked with some of those piloting the student development movement, and I took a look at the routes as they are charted in the literature of education and psychology. My tentative working conclusions were that: 1) the pilots seem to differ among themselves on where we are going; 2) the nature of their differences is only dimly perceived by those not on the bridge; and 3) we surely better keep our eyes open because none of us know much about the depth of the channel or about the hidden reefs that lurk just below the surface. Let me hasten to say that I am not at all distressed by the lack of unanimity regarding either destination or routes. As a matter of fact, I see no need for everyone in the profession to get aboard the same ship. We are far more likely to find our destination if we proceed via several different routes with good communication among us. Furthermore, given the present state of knowledge about student development, there are bound to be some captains sailing with confidence into the sunset, and it might be just as well if the entire profession did not follow like lemmings into the sea.

Before I drown in my own watery metaphor, let me make one last seaworthy point and get on with my assessment message. I suspect that we need navigational aids a little more sophisticated than the North Star, but fine precision instruments for the rough approximate work we are embarking upon would be quite inappropriate. As far as I know, we have no precision instruments to worry about in student development anyway,

but our dependence on rather crude assessment devices need not dissuade us from starting the voyage.

I would like to start my voyage this morning with a look at the three major routes to student development that can be identified in the literature. Let me attempt to capture the essence of each model, in a capsule description too brief to do full justice to the complexity of the concepts, but with the hope that it may help you as individual professionals decide which routes are useful and helpful in your situation.

For convenience in discussion, I shall label the models humanistic, developmental, and multidimensional. There is some overlap among the three approaches and broadly speaking, probably more agreement than disagreement among their adherents, but they grow out of different backgounds, they make different assumptions, and most important for my particular assignment, they assume somewhat different assessment procedures.

The practitioners in the profession appear to be oriented toward the humanistic model, the researchers toward the multidimensional model, and scholars and theorists toward the developmental model. I cannot help observing that it is truly unfortunate that these three critical specialties in the student development enterprise do not talk with one another more often to clarify positions and understandings. To my knowledge, this is the first time that anyone has even attempted to identify three different approaches to student development. For the most part, the profession seems to seek consensus on definitions broad enough and fuzzy enough so that no one can disagree. We would, I suggest, make more progress if we could sharpen our thinking with a few lively controversies. So far, the developmentalists have shown themselves willing to fight the humanists, but the

humanists seem unaware that anyone has challenged them on anything more serious than the usual complaints about their vague idealism. The multidimensionalists, however, seem prone to sharpen their thinking not by controversy, but by keeping an eye out for the good ideas from the other two models.

Let's talk first about the humanistic approach to student development since it is most familiar to counselors. It arises out of the theories of Maslow and Rogers and other so-called Third Force psychologists who believe that there is in each person a self-actualizing person waiting to emerge under the right conditions. They stress the dignity and worth of the individual, holding that if people and cultures would not thwart and misdirect development, people would grow in healthy and self-actualizing ways. We can understand their thinking best through the organic metaphor. If plants or people are raised in a properly nourishing environment, they will grow naturally toward their full potential; a poor environment on the other hand, will stunt or arrest growth. The goal of the humanists is to help students grow in unique and individualistic ways; they would no more impose their ideas on the direction that growth should take than a gardener would try to make a tulip out of a rose.

By and large, the counseling profession is humanistically oriented. The predominant methodology of the 1970's for example, consists of providing warmth, empathy, and understanding--some of the basic ingredients of humanism. Because the student development movement is spearheaded by personnel administrators and counselors, it too is strongly humanistic. The troublesome element is that there is little explicit recognition in the personnel profession that student development programs can be other

than humanistic. Many people simply assume that to be in favor of student development is to be a humanist. I hope to show you some alternatives, but to be non-judgmentally humanistic enough to leave the choice of direction for your professional development up to you.

The humanists are frequently accused of lacking both program and theory, but nothing could be further from the truth. The misunderstanding arises because humanists are prone to talk about "loving" and "caring" and "accepting"--words that many cognitively-oriented educators find hard to accept as formulae for determining program direction. But these words represent a program for action to dedicated humanists. They want honestly to create a campus environment of trust and caring in which all persons--students, faculty, staff--feel that they matter and that how they develop makes a difference to their colleagues. Humanists also present a specific educational program for student development with primary emphasis on the use of encounter groups, human potential seminars and the like. The theory behind encounter groups is that through the creation of a challenging yet accepting environment, students can become free to find that self-actualizing person within them that is waiting to emerge.

For some 30 years, educational institutions have flirted off and on with group methods for self-exploration, but the techniques meet with considerable resistance each time they surface. Nevertheless, the humanists have made a lot of impact on a few colleges and a little impact on a lot of colleges. I found in a recent survey of community college programs that up to one-fourth of the colleges offer some form of encounter group experience to students, and there are a few colleges in the country that attempt to provide a total humanistic educational experience.

Humanists have a fairly sophisticated theory; they have tried hard to demonstrate the validity of their approach through research, but they have difficulty with assessment. Part of their problem lies in their insistence upon the uniqueness of the individual. This makes it difficult to develop common assessment procedures and casts the assessment function into the rather expensive counseling mold. There are, however, some humanists willing to make the value judgment that there are some goals to which everyone should aspire--openness and honesty, for example. To some extent, such qualities seem measurable, but they run into the buzz saw of the developmentalists who claim that to adopt goals calling for such a "bag of virtues" has been shown fruitless and nonproductive. Sprinthall (1972) expresses the developmentalist's scorn when he writes

> The virtues [of the humanists] are topical and current but are still an arbitrary list of static traits, time-limited and situational. In this sense it is no different to talk about openness, spontaneity, etc. than it would have been to talk about being brave, clean, and reverent in a previous era. The traits are more up to date, but we are still dealing with a bag of virtues as educational objectives (p 352).

As most of you in this room will recall, honesty as a virtue that can be taught was pretty well discredited in the character education era of the 1930's when the Hartshorne and May studies showed that there is no such thing as a stable trait of honesty. Honesty depends on the situation. So too, goes the reasoning, does openness and spontaneity.

Humanists are probably at their theoretical best when using self-assessment procedures. If, in fact, you are committed to the notion that students know best what is possible and desirable for them, then self-assessment is surely necessary. Whether it is sufficient is a stickier question.

Self-assessment of personal development can vary all the way from a non-directive unstructured interview to a highly structured index of the difference between "real" and "ideal" self. In between these two extremes might be the student's preparation of a diary or journal of personal development or perhaps an analysis of a video-tape playback of the student interacting with others in an encounter group. A frequent model today, one assumed by the Tomorrow's Higher Education model (ACPA, 1974), is to work with students toward setting their own individually-prescribed objectives and working out with students agreed-upon assessment procedures. It should be said that self-assessment per se is not attached rigidly to any theoretical position. It is how one uses the procedure that is indicative of underlying assumptions. A true humanist, for example, would help students formulate their own objectives or construct their own scales for determining the difference between "real" and "ideal" self. One who took a position supporting common developmental dimensions, on the other hand, would specify the nature of the items, leaving only the rating of quantity to the student. Humanists frequently assume a counseling approach to assessment; other schools of thought place less emphasis on individualized relationships.

Self-evaluation has great strengths in an area in which student motivation is so crucial and knowledge so incomplete, but it also has some weaknesses. In the first place, it is difficult to defend in an age of accountability and competence-based education. If the student says he is personally competent and mature, who is to say he is not? This question becomes critical when advocates of student development programs insist on co-equal status in the curriculum. If one wants to

be equal in curricular matters, one has to play by the rules of academe. The traditional curriculum that student development specialists say they want to be a part of, is a long way yet from letting students determine course content and establish grading standards. Yet that is what some humanists propose to do in courses for which they seek academic credit. It is difficult, but not impossible, to sell a curricular program that differs radically from that which has shown such great resistance to change over the centuries. A few institutions, especially community colleges, have managed to gain equal status for their human development program by converting the entire institution to a humanistic philosophy, but that is likely to be the exception rather than the rule for some years to come.

A second difficulty with the humanistic approach to assessment concerns the credibility of the procedures, not only to faculty colleagues, but to students themselves. Many students, especially the New Students that I have written about (Cross, 1971), find it difficult to operate without frequent and fairly firm external points of reference regarding their progress--whether it be in reading speed or in self-acceptance. As we shall soon see there is a developmental theory that maintains that these students have not yet reached the stage of development where they <u>can</u> deal with the ambiguities and uncertainties of the humanistic approach to assessment.

So what are the alternatives? The developmental theorists are making a vigorous appearance now at the college level, and they pose some interesting contrasts to the humanists. Developmental approaches to student development grow out of the work of personality theorists such as Erik Erikson and Jane Loevinger and cognitive theorists such as Jean Piaget and Jerome

Bruner. Unlike the humanists, developmental theorists are perfectly comfortable taking a position that some directions of development are "better" than others and should serve as desirable goals for everyone. Developmentalists probably stand a pretty good chance of gaining equal status with the academic curriculum. In the first place, their approach has considerable intellectual appeal, but beyond that developmentalists are likely to feel quite comfortable with many of the traditions of academe. They, like chemistry professors, believe that they know better than students what constitutes their field of expertise. While they are not quite so crass as to give A's and F's in personal development, they do have confidence that position 9 or stage 6 or whatever is better than stage 1 on their scale of ego development or moral judgment.

To illustrate the developmental position, let me describe briefly one model that was specifically created for understanding the college years. It is the intellectual and ethical development scheme of William Perry of the Bureau of Study Council at Harvard (1970). Perry observed that students moved through a common developmental sequence. At the lowest level of development are students who perceive the world in absolutist terms of right and wrong, good and bad. They seek to learn from their teachers, who are perceived as authorities, the "right" answers. These students at the low end of Perry's developmental scale are close to some conceptions of the ideal student--simple, unquestioning, and obedient. Needless to say, Perry found few of these paragons at Harvard.

As the student begins to develop through interaction with a stimulating environment he perceives greater diversity of opinion, accepts it as legitimate but temporary, still hopeful of a final answer. Gradually

it becomes clear that uncertainty in this world and its knowledge is extensive and widespread. Students in the middle stages of development attempt to deal with ambiguity by not trying to make sense of it, granting instead that "anyone has a right to his own opinion." At the highest levels of development, the student finds his own identity and his own commitment. In the theory of developmentalists, growth moves through sequences from simplicity to complexity and from differentiation to integration.

This description of the developing student is a much tighter model than that of the humanists. Indeed, most developmental theorists talk about more circumscribed areas of concern than personal development. They use adjectives like moral development, ego development, or ethical development, but basically they are all talking about a core of being that is so basic that it is hard to see how it would not pervade all of what most of us mean when we talk about student development.

In a nutshell, developmental theory posits a central structural organization which is continually modified through interaction with the environment to evolve into higher-order structures representing levels of development. The three basic ideas around which developmental theory is built are structural organization, developmental sequence, and interactionism. The developmental position is that

> developmental behavior change is irreversible, general over a field of responses, sequential, and hierarchical. When a set of behavior changes meets all these criteria, changes are termed stages or structural reorganizations (Kohlberg & Mayer, 1972, p 486.)

Developmentalists would implement their theory by providing appropriately challenging and stimulating experiences which would push the

student into the next stage of development. They emphasize the role of cognitive reasoning and problem-solving with their description of the developmental stages providing the clue for the type of problem that would serve as the appropriate stimulus for the student at a given stage of development.

Lawrence Kohlberg has sparked a great deal of interest recently in moral development. He implements his theory by teaching courses which consist primarily of small-group discussions of moral dilemmas and of principles for solving them. There are also lectures and readings designed to raise some basic issues in moral philosophy and in psychology related to personal development. Sprinthall and his colleagues (Mosher, Sprinthall, et. al., 1971) present a related but somehwat different model for what they term "deliberate psychological education." Their developmental model emphasizes practical experience in working with other people as a means to self-understanding.

Since the theory and the programs of humanists and developmentalists differ substantially it is to be expected that assessment procedures will differ also. Developmentalists are interested in assessing the process by which conclusions or decisions are reached. They are not concerned about measuring which attitudes and values are adopted; rather they are looking at the reasoning of the student. Thus, their instruments for assessing student development are complex scales designed to reflect the nature of the underlying structural organization which may be called the ego, or cognitive structure or whatever. While such scales are extremely attractive because they are the only instruments we have to date that were designed specifically to measure developmental progress, they have some disadvantages too. They are almost always difficult to

administer and complicated to score, usually requiring specialized training in a specific theoretical position. Furthermore, because they aim at complex and little understood processes, the measures of developmental theorists are not nice clean instruments from a psychometric point of view. There are almost always problems with reliability, validity, etc. It is probably fair to say that the contributions of the developmentalists to date have been more theoretical than practical, but I would suggest that anyone who is seriously interested in student development as a profession would be well advised to be throughly grounded in the theory and models of the developmentalists.

The third approach to student development is familiar to many of you who read the research on students reported by people such as Trent and Medsker (1968), Chickering (1969) Feldman and Newcomb (1969), and Astin (1968). Multidimensional models for student development grow out of research measures and conceive of people growing at different rates along separate, but not necessarily independent dimensions. Models typically measure developmental status along 7 to 12 scales or vectors or competencies spanning the breadth and depth of human abilities. Multidimensionalists are usually not much concerned with theory but if they bow to any theorist, it is to B. F. Skinner and behaviorism in which the responses of organisms are linked to the stimuli of the environment. They try to establish the connections between cause and effect. The most forthright statement of an empirical approach to student development has been made by Panos (1968) who suggests that rather than starting with broad goals for education, we might go at it the other way around and find out what actually happens to students in college. "Perhaps" he says, "after we have been able to discover and adequately document what

the outcomes of college are we can think about whether we like them or not and what we can or cannot do about them (p 309).

To date, educators have followed the Panos prescription only to a point. Major attention has been given to what happens presently to the average student on the average campus. Some people, most notably Arthur Chickering (1969), have related student change to campus environment and made some recommendations about how to deliberately educate to maximize the types of change that take place now without much conscious planning. But by and large the educational community has not taken a position on what we like or don't like about what happens to students as they proceed through college, and we certainly have no program to accentuate the positive and eliminate the negative.

Most practitioners, I suspect, look first to the multidimensionalists for assessment tools for rather obvious reasons. Instruments such as the Omnibus Personality Inventory (OPI) and the Activities Index (AI) were carefully designed by respected researchers; they are relatively easy to obtain, to administer, and to score; and they result in so-called hard data that has a certain amount of academic credibility. The problem is that such research instruments are usually designed to measure what <u>does</u> happen, not what educators think <u>should</u> happen. For example, the finding that students across a broad spectrum of colleges become less supportive of traditional religious values from freshman to senior year does not indicate that educators set out to accomplish that end nor does it even indicate that we think that one's position with respect to religious practices is a major dimension of personal development. Most educators, and especially developmentalists, would be more interested in the <u>process</u> by which students reached their positions. If traditional religion is

rejected to demonstrate emancipation from parents or to curry favor with with peers, we are likely to think that the individual is in a fairly adolescent stage of development. If on the other hand, the student reaches a position on religion after a careful examination of its place in his or her life, then whatever the direction of the decision, the individual demonstrates personal development in the ability to make judgments consistent with a sense of identity.

While personality and attitude inventories can be used to assess student development, they must be carefully selected and all concerned--students, faculty, and student development facilitators--should have a clear understanding of what qualities are being measured and whether they represent dimensions of personal development.

Most competency-based programs of education are multidimensional, and some of them have used some very creative approaches to assessment. Alverno College in Milwaukee, Wisconsin (1974) has designed a competence-based program which defines eight competencies each with six levels of accomplishment. Levels are sequenced in steps of increasing complexity and conceptual difficulty, and students proceed step by step to demonstrate competency. By careful definition of what they wish to accomplish and by obtaining consensus within the college community that demonstration of these competencies fulfills graduation requirements, Alverno has set the stage for good assessment.

Let's take a simple example of how an Alverno student might demonstrate Level 1 achievement in Competency 7. Competency 7 is defined as the development of an awareness and understanding of the world in which the individual lives. At Level 1, the student is expected to demonstrate perception and knowledge of events in the contemporary world. One way to

assess that competency would be through a typical test of current events. But Alverno takes the position that the competency they wish to encourage is not paper and pencil knowledge but the ability to converse with other adults about contemporary events. Thus their assessment consists of directed discussion in which four to six students sit down with a trained discussion leader to engage in oral exchange. A trained four-member assessment team drawn from students, faculty, alumnae, and people from the community, observes the performance, evaluates it in specific terms and reaches consensus regarding the competency of each student.

Such a model has potential for student development programs. The ability to communicate effectively, the development of interpersonal sensitivities, and an understanding of the contemporary world are all developmental competencies that can be assessed through use of directed discussion.

Fortunately we are becoming increasingly sophisticated in the development of a great variety of assessment techniques. The CAEL Project (Cooperative Assessment of Experiential Learning) is successfully combining the measurement expertise of Educational Testing Service with the practical experience of educators in the search for new ways to assess experiential learning. Since personal development leans to experiential learning, as opposed to classroom or book learning, the new booklet issued by CAEL entitled A Compendium of Assessment Techniques (Knapp & Sharron, 1975) provides a helpful overview for student development specialists. It defines, illustrates, evaluates, and provides references for nine procedures for the assessment of experiential learning. Included are very brief discussions of performance tests, simulations, assessment

centers, examinations, interviews, self-assessment, ratings, and product assessment.

I have spent much of my precious time this morning trying to clarify the meaning behind three prominent models for student development because it is my firm conviction that most of the sins of assessment are committed because people do not know what they want to measure rather than because they do not know how to measure an objective that is clear to them. Student development specialists need not be frightened out of the assessment arena because of a mystique of technical jargon. What is needed is a careful casting of procedures into an assessment framework with due respect for such elementary concepts of measurement as reliability and validity. Does the technique give consistency of measurement from time to time and from person to person? Does it measure what you want it to measure?

The field of student development is quite fluid at the moment. This means that there is room for almost any carefully formulated hypothesis about the developmental process. No one of the three models I have presented has a clear mandate to serve as <u>the</u> model for student development specialists. As a matter of fact most practitioners are eclectic pragmatists, drawing from whatever theory seems to work. But pragmatic license should not serve as a cover-up for blissful ignorance of the alternatives available. I suspect that ACPA will not find successful new careers for student development facilitators until <u>individuals</u> within the profession are able to formulate and articulate their own clear concept of student development. Obviously, not everyone needs to come to the same conclusion, but we do need to extricate the profession from the massive confusion that reigns today as ACPA moves into its

second half century.

Let me give an example of the sort of problem that exists now in our professional journals. A recent article described nine "student development" projects including among them such activities as an information/crisis switchboard and a student characteristics survey. However valuable such campus services may be, calling them "student development" only confuses the issue, leading to the inevitable article that followed in another journal entitled "Student services vs. student development: Is there a difference?"in which the author urges readers to do their job and not to worry about distinguishing between developmental and service programs.

There is, I think, a profound and important difference between student services and student development that must be recognized if the movement is to have any credibility. Offering student services that are useful and desired and even necessary is not the same thing as offering programs deliberately designed to help students know who they are and what they wish to be and to do in this life. This is not to say that certain student services cannot be student development oriented. Grant (1972), for example, notes that financial aid can be administered to stimulate student growth as well as to meet financial need. What should be made clear is that student development is not just another euphemism that will give student personnel work a more modern look. It is an educational program deliberately designed to foster the personal development of students in the best way that we know how.

If we are to make substantial progress and to gain the respect of students and academic colleagues, we will have to begin to educate a new

generation of student development specialists in the graduate schools and in substantive in-service workshops. They will need to be able to contribute to the scholarship and research and theory and practice of human development from birth through adolescence and college--from marriage through retirement and death. We have not yet started to train this kind of leadership in our graduate schools. Until we develop our own scholars and theorists and researchers, we will make no long-lasting contribution to student development and the concept will die aborning.

May your 50th anniversary represent the continuation of the best of the old and the start of a successful new career.

3/4/75

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